

## GAD - Generalized Anxiety Disorder

### **GAD-C      COMPLICATIONS**

**OUTCOME:** The patient/family will understand some of the complications associated with generalized anxiety disorder.

**STANDARDS:**

1. Discuss that GAD can cause major disruptions in family and work relationships. Refer to counseling or behavioral health services as appropriate.
2. Discuss that GAD can cause many physical symptoms such as chest pain, dizziness, abdominal pain, headaches, jaw pain, palpitations, shortness of breath, bruxism, broken teeth, fatigue, sleep disruption, and other physical symptoms. Generalized anxiety disorder is frequently misdiagnosed as cardiac or gastrointestinal disease.
3. Explain that untreated GAD may worsen and result in depression and/or suicide.

### **GAD-CUL      CULTURAL/SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF HEALTH**

**OUTCOME:** The patient/family will understand the impact and influences cultural and spiritual traditions, practices, and beliefs have on health and wellness.

**STANDARDS:**

1. Explain that the outcome of disease processes may be influenced by choices related to health and lifestyles, e.g., diet, exercise, sleep, stress management, hygiene, full participation in the medical plan.
2. Discuss the potential role of cultural/spiritual traditions, practices and beliefs in achieving and maintaining health and wellness.
3. Explain that traditional medicines/treatments should be reviewed with the healthcare provider to determine if there are interactions with prescribed treatment.
4. Explain that the medical treatment plan must be followed as prescribed to be effective and that some medications/treatments take time to demonstrate effectiveness.
5. Discuss that traditions, such as sweat lodges, may affect some conditions in detrimental ways. Healing customs or using a traditional healer may have a positive effect on the patient's condition.
6. Refer to clergy services, traditional healers, or other culturally appropriate resources.

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### GAD-DP      DISEASE PROCESS

**OUTCOME:** The patient/family will understand some of the current information about cause and expected course of generalized anxiety disorder and will make a plan to obtain treatment, when appropriate.

**STANDARDS:**

1. Explain that GAD is a primary disorder in which the patient has a constant and severe sense of anxiety/fear which is not attributable to a specific stressor and is significant enough to interfere with work, home, or social functioning.
2. Explain that as of May, 2003, it is believed that GAD results from a dysfunction of the GABA neurotransmitter system in the brain. Discuss that GAD is a neurochemical/biological disorder and is not the result of a weak personality or inappropriate parenting. (*NOTE: This information is subject to change as new research is done. Providers are encouraged to seek information from an up-to-date primary source such as journal articles or textbooks.*)
3. Explain that symptoms of GAD may include difficulty sleeping, difficulty with concentration, unusual sense of fear in ordinary circumstances, stressed relationships, inability to work with others, unusual number of physical complaints for which a source cannot be found.
4. Explain that because the symptoms of GAD are numerous and non-specific, the diagnosis can only be made by a trained healthcare professional. Explain that because GAD has a tendency to run in families, the healthcare professional will likely request information about other family members.
5. Explain that generalized anxiety disorder is typically a chronic disease which is often progressive and may be associated with other mental/emotional disorders. (For example: agoraphobia, panic disorder, and/or depression.)
6. Explain that the symptoms of GAD may get better or worse at different times; symptoms will often worsen when the patient is more stressed, but symptoms may not be related to outside stressors. Explain that there is a tendency for GAD to worsen over time if it is not treated, but there are effective treatments available.

**Refer to GAD-TX.**

### GAD-EX      EXERCISE

**OUTCOME:** The patient/family will understand the role of exercise in the treatment of generalized anxiety disorder.

**STANDARDS:**

1. Explain that it is believed that regular exercise favorably alters the chemistry of the brain by changing the levels of various neurotransmitter chemicals and by degrading (“burning up”) stress hormones.

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2. Explain that many physicians believe that exercise can be an important part of the treatment of GAD and other emotional disorders and that the patient's physician or other provider may prescribe exercise. As appropriate, encourage the patient to ask the physician or provider about starting an exercise program.
3. Explain that the optimal level of exercise may vary from patient-to-patient, but that 30 minutes of aerobic exercise (e.g., fast walking, bicycling, running, swimming laps) daily is usually enough to result in improvement in GAD symptoms. Encourage the patient to increase the intensity of the activity as the patient becomes more fit.
4. Explain that other forms of exercise (e.g., weight-lifting, sit-ups) as well as aerobic exercise may very well be helpful, but have not been studied. Encourage the patient to engage in whatever form of exercise the patient is able and willing to do. This may include increasing daily activities, e.g., gardening, house cleaning, dancing. Explain that most people should be evaluated by a physician or other provider before starting an exercise program. Refer to physician or provider as appropriate. Refer to community-based exercise program(s) as appropriate.
5. Discuss obstacles to a personal exercise plan and solutions to those obstacles. Assist the patient in developing a personal exercise plan. **Refer to HPDP-EX.**

### **GAD-FU      FOLLOW-UP**

**OUTCOME:** The patient and/or family will understand the importance of follow-up in the treatment of generalized anxiety disorder.

#### **STANDARDS:**

1. Discuss the importance of follow-up care.
2. Discuss the procedure for obtaining follow-up appointments.
3. Emphasize that appointments should be kept.

### **GAD-IR      INFORMATION AND REFERRAL**

**OUTCOME:** The patient/family will receive information and referral for alternative or additional services as needed or desired.

#### **STANDARDS:**

1. Provide the patient/family with alternative or additional sources for care and services.
2. Provide the patient/family with assistance in securing alternative or additional resources as needed.

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### **GAD-L      LITERATURE**

**OUTCOME:** The patient/family will receive literature about generalized anxiety disorder.

**STANDARDS:**

1. Provide parent/family with literature on generalized anxiety disorder.
2. Discuss the content of the literature.

### **GAD-M      MEDICATIONS**

**OUTCOME:** The patient/family will understand the purpose, proper use, and expected outcomes of prescribed drug therapy.

**STANDARDS:**

1. Describe the name, strength, purpose, dosing directions, and storage of the medication.
2. Discuss the risks, benefits, and common or important side effects of the medication and follow up as appropriate.
3. Discuss any significant drug/drug, drug/food, and alcohol interactions, as appropriate.
4. Discuss the importance of keeping a list of all current prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbs, traditional remedies, and supplements. Encourage the patient to bring this list and pill bottles to appointments for medication reconciliation.

### **GAD-SM      STRESS MANAGEMENT**

**OUTCOME:** The patient will understand the role of stress management in anxiety disorders.

**STANDARDS:**

1. Explain that uncontrolled stress is linked with the onset of major depression, contributes to more severe symptoms of anxiety, and can interfere with the treatment of anxiety disorders.
2. Explain that effective stress management may reduce the severity of the patient's symptoms as well as help improve health and well-being.
3. Discuss that stress may exacerbate adverse health behaviors such as increased tobacco, alcohol, or other substance use as well as inappropriate eating, all of which can increase the severity of the anxiety and increase the risk of depression and suicidal behaviors.
4. Discuss various stress management strategies which may help maintain a healthy lifestyle. Examples may include:

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- a. Becoming aware of your own reactions to stress
  - b. Recognizing and accepting your limits
  - c. Talking with people you trust about your worries or problems
  - d. Setting realistic goals
  - e. Getting enough sleep
  - f. Maintaining a healthy diet
  - g. Exercising regularly
  - h. Taking vacations
  - i. Practicing meditation, self-hypnosis, and positive imagery
  - j. Practicing physical relaxation methods such as deep breathing or progressive muscular relaxation
  - k. Participating in spiritual or cultural activities
5. Provide referrals as appropriate.

### GAD-TX      TREATMENT

**OUTCOME:** The patient/family will understand the treatment options that may be used to treat anxiety.

**STANDARDS:**

1. Explain that the treatment plan will be made by the patient and medical team after reviewing available options. Explain that treatment for GAD may vary according to the patient's life circumstances, severity of the condition, and available resources.
2. Discuss the treatment plan, including lifestyle adaptation, pharmacologic, and psychosocial aspects of the treatment plan.
  - a. Regular exercise will usually contribute significantly to improving the symptoms of GAD and in some cases will eliminate the need for medication. **Refer to GAD-EX.**
  - b. Medication may be prescribed on an individualized basis, according to need. **Refer to GAD-M.**
  - c. Some form of counseling or psychotherapy will usually be prescribed initially and in some cases may be continued indefinitely.
3. Discuss the importance of fully participating in the treatment plan, including scheduled follow-up. Explain that GAD usually can be treated successfully, but that the patient's active participation in the treatment plan is critical to a good outcome.